

QUESTION OF "GOEL"
by Willis E. Bishop

(From study in the Book of Ruth)

Ruth 2:19: And [Ruth's] mother-in-law said unto her, "Where hast thou gleaned today, and where did you work? Blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee." And Ruth told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz."

Verse 20: And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead." And Naomi said unto her, "The man is near unto us, one of our kinsmen."

"One of our kinsmen." In Hebrew the word "kinsman" is the word "goel" [go-el]. It occurs a number of times in the book of Ruth from this point on.

Chapter 2 verse 20; then chapter 3 verse 9: And Boaz said to Ruth, "Who are you?" And she said, "I am Ruth, thine handmaid. Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid, for you are a "goel."

Chapter 3 verse 12 - Boaz speaking: "And now it is true that I am a 'goel'. However, there is a 'goel' nearer than I."

In chapter 3 verse 13 we do not have the noun form, but we have the verb form four times. The noun "goel" is based on the verb "goel" which means "to redeem." The "goel" is a redeemer, and I read verse 13 in light of that because it would be that literally: "Tarry this night and it shall be in the morning if he will redeem thee, well [let him]. But if he will not redeem thee, then will I redeem thee, as the Lord liveth. Lie down until the morning."

Four times in that verse is the verb form.

Now chapter 4 verse 1: Then went Boaz unto the gate and sat him down there, and behold, the "goel" of whom Boaz spoke came by. [Verse 3]: And Boaz said unto the "goel"

In chapter 4 verse 6: And the "goel" said, "I cannot redeem it for myself lest I mar mine own inheritance. Redeem thou my right to thyself, for I cannot redeem it."

In verse 8: Therefore the "goel" said unto Boaz, "Buy it for thee." So he drew off his shoe.

And then in verse 14: And the women said unto Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord which hath not left thee this day without a 'goel', that his name be famous in Israel."

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I point out the importance of a "goel" in connection with the story of Ruth. There are also other responsibilities of a "goel" which I would like to deal with.

It was the responsibility of a "goel" to redeem property. Turn to Leviticus 25:25: If thy brother hath become poor and hath sold away some [or from] his possession [not all of it], then shall his near kin ["goel"] come, and he shall redeem that which his brother sold.

If a man had to sell part of his property for some reason, a near of kin had the responsibility to come and redeem that if he could.

Leviticus 25:26: And if the man have no one to redeem it, and he himself be able to redeem it, then let him count the years of the sale thereof and restore the overpayment unto the man to whom he sold it. And he shall return unto his possession.

But if he be not able to buy it [that is, buy it back for himself], then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that has bought it until the year of jubilee. And in the jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession.

The "goel" had the responsibility, if he could, to buy back property which his brother sold of necessity. If there was no one who could buy back the property, it would remain with the one who bought it until the year of jubilee, and then it would be returned to the man who sold it.

Regarding the year of jubilee, Israel had a provision for retaining property (earlier in Leviticus 25). Every seventh year was a sabbatical year in which no farming work was done. Seven times seven of those cycles is forty-nine - the forty-ninth year was a sabbatical year. Then the fiftieth year was the year of jubilee. At that time property was returned to its original owners and those who were servants to other Israelites because of indebtedness were released. That avoided the accumulation of wealth into the hands of a certain few and provided for the return of ancestral lands. The land also was to rest, even though jubilee followed a sabbatical year. The land really belonged to the Lord, and He kept it within families as much as possible.

The "goel's" redemption of property becomes important in Ruth chapter 4 when Naomi has some property that needs to be redeemed.

Q. Re returning the property free.

A. Provision was made in adjusting the sales price of property according to how close it was to the year of jubilee. [In other words, the purchaser would actually be leasing the property until jubilee, when it was returned to the original

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owner.] The Scripture doesn't say anything about any improvements made to the property. But Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that improvements were considered a part of the value of the land, and allowance would be made for that. It was a fair deal all the way through.

Q. Re overpayment.

A. In verse 27: "restore the overpayment." If the "goel" came and redeemed it before the fiftieth year there would be an adjustment for any overpayment.

Another responsibility of the "goel" was to redeem a poor brother, as in Leviticus 25, which gives the details. Look at verse 47:

And if a sojourner or a stranger become rich by thee and thy brother by him become poor and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the descendents of the foreigner's family, after he is sold he may be redeemed again. One of his brethren may redeem him. Either his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him, or any that is a blood relative [that is not the word "goel" there] of his family may redeem him, or if he is able he may redeem himself.

And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubilee, and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him.

If someone was poor and said to a stranger or sojourner, "I'll sell myself to you as a servant," then this near of kin to him was to come and redeem him if he could -- buy him back out of that slavery. In more detail, in Exodus 21 we find that slavery lasted for only six years, and in the seventh year the slave went free. The price that he sold himself for was based on six years of service. But if the jubilee came before the six years were up, he was free on that year of jubilee. This does not bear on the book of Ruth, so we will not continue on this.

Q. When did the year of jubilee start - does anybody know?

A. The Jews had four calendars, and the year of jubilee began with Rosh Hashanah. That is not in January as we know it, but about two-thirds of the way down the year. They had four calendars for various reasons. One was for the time they would tithe the fruit; one for the time they would tithe the animals; one for the civil year; and one for the religious year.

The third responsibility of the "goel" was to avenge the murder of one of his kinsmen, as an executioner within the law. To escape the "goel," the slayer could flee to the nearest city of refuge. The details concerning cities of refuge and handling of intentional or accidental slayings are given in Numbers 35.

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The "goel" was to redeem property, redeem a poor brother, and he was the avenger of murder.

Again Ruth 2:20: And Naomi said unto her [that is, Ruth, her daughter-in-law], "Blessed be he of the Lord who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead." And Naomi said unto Ruth, "The man [that, is Boaz] is near unto us, one of our kinsmen."

Another responsibility of a "goel" is found in Deuteronomy 25, beginning at verse 5. The word "goel" is not used in this passage, but, we find in Ruth chapter 4 that it was one of his responsibilities.

Deuteronomy 25:5: If brethren dwell together and one of them die and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry outside the family unto a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in unto her, take her to him as his wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her.

The Latin word for brother-in-law is "levir," and therefore this is commonly spoken of as a "levirate" marriage. If a man dies without children, a near kinsman (Ruth chapter 4 "goel") was to marry that woman. And in Deuteronomy 25:6: It shall be that the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed in the name of his brother who is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel. And if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders and say, "My husband's brother refuses to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel. He will not perform the duty of my husband's brother."

Then the elders of his city shall call him and speak to him, and if he stand to it and say, "I desire not to take her," then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, "So shall it be done unto that man who will not build up his brother's house." And his house shall be called in Israel, "The house of him who hath his shoe loosed."

This part is evident in Ruth chapter 4, where Boaz, as the "goel," will marry Ruth. So we have two of the responsibilities of the "goel" in the book of Ruth: the redeeming of property and the marriage of a widow without a son.

Though it is not related to the book of Ruth, I could scarcely omit the book of Job in speaking about a "goel." In Job 19:17, Job says, "My breath is offensive to my wife, and I am repulsive to the children of my own tribe."

We won't go into all the problems Job had, but one of his problems was an offensive breath. Verse 18: "Yea, young children despise

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me. I arise, and they speak against me. All my intimate friends abhor me, and they whom I love are turned against me. My bones cling to my skin, to my flesh, and I am escaped by the skin of my teeth. Have pity on me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me.

"Why do ye persecute me as God does, and are not satisfied with my flesh? O that my words were now written, O that they were inscribed in a book, that they were engraved with an iron pen and lead in a rock forever!"

While we are not about to discuss the authorship of the book of Job, and we don't know just exactly who wrote it, there is one possibility that he may have written it himself because he says, "O that my words were now written."

Job 19:25 (the verse I am after): "For I know that my redeemer [my "goel"] liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And after my skin, this is destroyed, [sic] yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another [or as a stranger]. My heart yearns within me."

"I know that my redeemer liveth." You know that aria in Handel's "Messiah" that beautiful piece of music is taken from this verse of Scripture. "My 'goel' liveth." And though Job realized he was just about dead, he said, "After worms destroy my body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." He had hope of seeing God certainly, and also of a resurrection. So much for the book of Job.

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